

Devotional for March 29, 2020 — Esther 4:12-16

Let's address the question that's on a lot of our hearts. Where is God in the midst of this pandemic? It's easy to believe that God is good and that he loves us and has a plan for us when things are going well. But what about when we've lost our jobs or have to work from home or work overtime to save others? Where is God when it seems like the whole world is going on quarantine, and we see death tolls rising everyday? Where is God in the coronavirus?

Jesus has made us a beautiful promise that we can each hold onto this morning - **surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.** Even now, Jesus is with us. He is walking with us through uncertainty, through economic fallout, through disease. Way before Jesus came to earth as a baby, a prophet named Isaiah told us that his name would be Emmanuel, which means God with us. God is with us. This pandemic is not a surprise to Him. He didn't wake up one day and think, gee, I better figure out what to do about this. No. God knew before it started, and He already knows when and how it will end. In the meantime, He's asking us to trust Him. God is working in our midst. We may not see it clearly now, but one day, we will be able to look back on this period of history and know that God was working behind the scenes. Even now, we can see snippets of Him revealing Himself to us. We see the Image of God in the way people have come together to care for one another in this crisis. We see Him in the way He's causing us to re-evaluate what's really important. Jesus is God with us. God has not abandoned us. He is right here with us, feeling our pain and giving us hope in a crisis.

There is a young woman in the Bible who had to trust God through a very scary, uncertain time. No, she wasn't facing a global pandemic, but her people were threatened with extinction. Her name was Esther, and interestingly, her story is only one of two books in the Bible that never mention God. It can be easy to look at her story and assume that God wasn't there. God's name may not be mentioned, but He is still the main character. When we look closely, we see His fingerprints are evident in every crazy turn of events throughout her story. He is clearly evident behind the scenes in her life.

Esther was a beautiful young Jewish woman who lived in Ancient Persia. One day the Queen of Persia refused to listen to the King's command and was exiled from the palace. Esther was chosen as her replacement. Esther was an orphan who had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai advised her not to tell anyone she was a Jew until the time was right.

The time came when Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, an advisor to the king. This made Haman so mad that he convinced the king to kill not just Mordecai, but the entire Jewish race as a punishment for one man's insubordination. Now remember, Esther was a Jew, but hadn't revealed that to anyone in the palace, including the king.

There was a law in the land that no one may enter the king's presence without being summoned, by penalty of death. The only exception was if the king extended his golden scepter to you. It had been over a month since Esther had been summoned to the king, but Mordecai insisted that she go to the king and tell him to save her people.

Here's what Mordecai said to her, *"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"*

Esther musters up the courage to confront the king, who not only spares her life but changes his edict. Instead of her people being rounded up and killed, they can now come together and fight back against their enemies. What was meant to be a day of weeping and sadness turned into victory for the Jewish people. God was working behind the scenes in Esther's life, just like He's working behind the scenes in yours.

We can learn lessons from Queen Esther. To paraphrase Mordecai, who knows, but maybe you have been put in your current position, for such a time as this. Maybe God has been working behind the scenes in your life to bring you to this day, this position in life, for a reason. It doesn't matter if you're suddenly a stay-at home parent, a healthcare provider, a grocery store clerk, a leader making tough decisions, a sudden job seeker, or a thousand other possibilities. God knew when you were born that you would be in this position during the COVID-19 crisis. He has uniquely placed you, wherever you are, to accomplish a job that only you can do. He has been molding you, shaping you into the person you are, bringing you through your various life experiences, for such a time as this. No matter your past, present, or future, God has been working behind the scenes in your life, and He will continue to do that for as long as you live.

And so, just like Esther, we can be faithful. This virus may knock us down, but if we remain faithful by trusting in God, it won't knock us out. As humans, we crave stability and comfort. We often don't like change or surprises. It can be tempting,

when everything is going well, to sink into stability and make comfort our king. It's in times like now, when literally the whole world is turned upside down, when we realize that stability and normalcy are only a mirage.

And yet, while we watch the world around us crumble, we can remain faithful to the God who never changes. His Word is true yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He is the only true source of stability and strength. Let's lean into His power, and draw our strength from Him. When our world is crumbling around us, God is our rock and our fortress.

Esther also showed courage when she approached the king. Right now, we are living in scary times. Our courage is being tested on a daily basis. Human courage can only be beat down so many times before it's gone completely. But godly courage is never-ending. Godly courage doesn't come from our own efforts, but it comes from the knowledge that no matter what happens, we're in God's hands. If we lose our jobs, we're in God's hands. If we lose money in the stock market, we're in God's hands. If we get sick, we're in God's hands. If we die, we're in God's hands. If God is for us, who can stand against us?

This pandemic challenges us to live courageously. It takes courage to be generous when we lack resources ourselves. It takes courage to remain calm while our world slides into chaos. For some of us, it takes courage to practice social distancing and stay home, when home isn't a safe place. We could all use courage right now. Let's find it in the arms of Jesus.

This world is not our home. If you put your faith in God and believe that Jesus died for your sins, you have a better world waiting for you. A world that knows no doubt, no disease, no sickness or pain. This knowledge can give us joy and courage when our own joy and courage fails us.

(PRAYER)

The Invitation

If you've never accepted Christ as your Savior, or if you need him to give you a little extra courage today, pray along with me, out loud or in your heart, wherever you're at, as we ask God to give us courage, wisdom, and faithfulness for the weeks to come.

Father, We know that We are broken. We know that We cannot face the troubles of this world on my own. We admit that We are a sinner. But Jesus, We believe that you died to take away my sins and give me eternal life with you. So right now, We confess with my mouth that you are Lord, and We invite you to be Lord of my life. Give me courage, wisdom, and faithfulness to face these current hardships, and whatever the future may hold. In your name We pray, amen.

If you accepted Christ into your life for the first time today, or if you would like to talk more about it, please go to lymanwesleyan.com/prayer and fill out the form. We would love to hear what God is doing in your life! As always, stay safe, and we hope to see you in person soon!

Bible Study for the Family

Read Esther 4:12-16 then go through the questions together.

Try reading one verse then switching off with someone else to read.

- 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai,
13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape.
14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?
15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:
16 "Go! Gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days - night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

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1. Helping others is a way we show love for them. Has there ever been a time where someone needed your help, but you were afraid to? Did you help them? Why or why not?
2. God was with the Israelites, even though he didn't always talk to them. God promises to be with us. Does that make it easier to not be scared?
3. Esther was afraid of upsetting the king, but she did it anyway to help others. We can be brave because of God loves us. What's one thing you can do this week to brave for others?